

TWO STEP POST-DEPOSITION TREATMENT OF ILD LAYER FOR A LOWER DIELECTRIC CONSTANT AND IMPROVED MECHANICAL PROPERTIES

RELATED PATENT APPLICATION

This application is related to the following: Docket # TSMC02-0520, Ser. No. 10/421,187, filing date 4/23/03; assigned to a common assignee.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The invention relates to the field of fabricating a semiconductor device and in particular to a method of improving the mechanical and insulating properties of a low k dielectric layer used to isolate metal layers in an interconnect structure.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

An important process during the fabrication of semiconductor devices is formation of metal interconnects that provide electrical paths between conductive layers. Metal interconnects consist of trenches that provide horizontal connections between conductive features and vias or contacts that provide vertical connections between metal layers. Metal layers are insulated from each other by a dielectric layer to prevent capacitance coupling or crosstalk between the metal wiring. Recent improvements in interlevel dielectric layer (ILD) performance have involved replacing SiO_2 that has a dielectric constant (k) of about 4 with a low k material that has a k value between 2.5 and 3.5 such as carbon doped SiO_2 and fluorine doped SiO_2 which is also called fluorosilicate glass (FSG).

One form of carbon doped oxide is called SiCOH and is typically deposited by a chemical vapor deposition (CVD) or plasma enhanced CVD (PECVD) method from an organosilane precursor and oxygen source to afford a Si content of 15-18 atomic %, an oxygen content of 28-30 at. %, a carbon content of 16-18 at. %, and a hydrogen content of 36-38 atomic %. SiCOH includes Si-O, Si-C, and Si-H bonds according to infrared analysis. Other low k dielectric materials that are used as ILD layers include polymers such as hydrogen silsesquioxane (HSQ), methylsilsesquioxane (MSQ), poly(arylether), and fluorinated polyimide which are applied by a spin-on procedure and have good cap filling capability. HSQ and MSQ ($\text{CH}_3\text{SiO}_{1.5}$) typically do not reach a low k value until heated to temperatures of about 400°C . These low k dielectric materials are normally cured by baking from about 350°C to 450°C in order to drive out residual water, solvents, or traces of monomers that could outgas in subsequent thermal cycles and degrade device performance. For example, water may have a corrosive effect on copper and traces of nitrogen containing compounds can poison a photoresist patterning step used to form vias or trenches in the dielectric layer.

A transmission delay in the wiring which is commonly known as an RC delay is a function of capacitance between the metal layers and resistance within the wiring. RC delay is not only improved by switching to a low k dielectric material that reduces parasitic capacitance but also by replacing aluminum with copper wiring that has a lower resistivity.

Low k dielectric layers, especially carbon doped silicon oxide, HSQ, and MSQ exhibit a high porosity and low density which yields a soft film that has stress related issues. For instance, a chemical mechanical polish (CMP) step is typically used to

planarize low k dielectric layers or a metal layer adjacent to a low k dielectric material. The etching and polishing action during a CMP step is likely to scratch or form an indentation in the surface of a soft insulating material. These surface defects will degrade device performance if not corrected by an expensive rework process.

Although a carbon doped oxide layer and SiCOH in particular is becoming more popular as ground rules shrink in newer semiconductor devices, the material must be densified in a post-deposition step or water is easily absorbed during a storage period that may vary from a few minutes to several hours before the next step in the fabrication scheme. Water uptake leads to a large increase in dielectric constant which defeats the purpose of the low k dielectric material.

Prior art methods for densifying low k dielectric layers include a plasma treatment with N₂ and He in U. S. Patent 6,465,372. The densification is preferably done with N₂ at a temperature of about 400°C and prevents loss of carbon during subsequent oxidizing processes such as plasma etches. The densification leaves the C-H and Si-C bonds intact and does not change the refractive index or dielectric constant of the film.

U.S. Patent 6,403,464 provides a method for removing moisture from a low k dielectric layer and is a high density nitrogen plasma treatment at a temperature of from 350°C to 450°C. U.S. Patent 6,436,808 employs a NH₃/N₂ plasma treatment of an ILD layer such as SiCOH that is repeated one or more times during a damascene process. This method maintains Si-H bonds that are needed for a constant low k value.

A popular means of producing an interconnect structure is by a damascene technique in which an opening **14** such as a via shown in FIG. 1 is etched in a stack comprised of dielectric layer **13** on an etch stop layer **12** that has been deposited on a

substrate **10**. Substrate **10** is comprised of at least one conductive layer **11** and one or more dielectric layers (not shown). The opening is initially formed in a photoresist layer (not shown) that serves as an etch mask for the pattern transfer.

In FIG. 2, a diffusion barrier layer **15** is deposited in the opening **14** by a CVD method followed by deposition of a metal layer **16** to fill the opening. Diffusion barrier layer **15** protects metal layer **16** from traces of water or other chemicals contained in dielectric layer **13** or in etch stop layer **12**. A CMP step is then used to lower the metal layer **16** to be coplanar with dielectric layer **13**.

One problem associated with the damascene process is that a soft dielectric layer **13** is susceptible to the formation of defects such as a divot **17** and a scratch **18**. For example, a SiCOH layer that is not densified is likely to suffer divot and scratch defects **17**, **18** that may be removed by a rework process but such an effort adds considerable expense to the fabrication scheme. An uneven surface surrounding the metal layer **16** is not tolerable. One concern is that a subsequent photoresist patterning step on dielectric layer **13** will have a small process window because of an uneven thickness resulting from divots **17**. Therefore, a method that hardens dielectric layer **13** prior to a polish step is necessary. Furthermore, dielectric layer **13** is preferably transformed into a more thermally stable layer in order to avoid a breakdown during subsequent thermal cycles.

One stabilization approach mentioned in U.S. Patent 6,028,015 treats a low k dielectric layer with H₂ plasma. The process is believed to convert a dangling bond on Si to a Si-H bond and also prevents moisture from being attracted to the reactive Si sites. Similarly, a fluorine doped SiO₂ layer is treated with hydrogen plasma in U.S.

Patent 6,103,601. In U.S. Patent 6,372,301, a hydrogen plasma treatment of a fluorinated SiO₂ layer improves adhesion to a subsequently deposited diffusion barrier layer in a via. Another post-deposition treatment of a low k dielectric film involves a densification of a Si-O-C layer in NH₃ at 400°C or optionally with a He, Ar, or N₂ plasma. A hydrogen ion implant to inhibit cracking in a low k film is performed with a plasma immersion ion implantation in U.S. Patent 6,346,488.

A plasma treatment with Ar/H₂ is described in U.S. Patent 6,204,204 for reducing resistivity in a TaN barrier layer. Another plasma treatment in U.S. Patent 6,528,423 improves resistance in a SiC barrier layer to Cu migration.

A post-deposition method is also desirable that is able to further improve the insulating property of a low k dielectric layer. Prior art methods can prevent a dielectric constant from becoming larger by blocking water absorption but these processes do not teach how to lower a k value of a deposited film. Unfortunately, none of the prior art methods are capable of densifying a low k dielectric layer, improving its thermal stability and reducing its dielectric constant in a single process.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

An objective of the present invention is to provide a method of hardening a low k dielectric layer such that it is more resistant to mechanical stresses including a CMP process and an applied vacuum on the back side of a substrate by a wafer chuck in a process tool.

A further objective of the present invention is to reduce the dielectric constant of a deposited low k dielectric layer to further enhance its insulating property.

A still further objective of the present invention is to improve the thermal stability of a low k dielectric layer so that it has a higher breakdown threshold and is more chemically inert.

Yet another objective of the present invention is to provide a plasma treatment method that is compatible with current etch and deposition techniques so that new tools and materials are not required.

These objectives are achieved by depositing a low k dielectric layer on a substrate. The low k dielectric layer is preferably a carbon doped oxide layer but may also be HSQ, MSQ, or similar organosilicon materials known to those skilled in the art. In one embodiment, a low k material is deposited on an etch stop layer in a damascene scheme. The resulting low k dielectric layer may be cured at a temperature up to 500°C to drive off water and trace amounts of monomers and solvents.

A key feature of the invention is a two step plasma treatment of the low k dielectric layer. The plasma treatment methods include a plasma enhanced CVD process. In a first step, a helium plasma is applied which promotes the rearrangement of the Si-O matrix to form a more crosslinked network that has a higher mechanical stability. There is no net loss of Si-O or Si-C bonds since no methane or water is detected in a residual gas analysis (RGA). The plasma treatment also lowers the dielectric constant of the cured film. A second step with hydrogen plasma transforms the outer surface of the low k dielectric layer so that it is enriched with Si-H bonds that improve thermal stability. Si-C and Si-O bond breaking does occur and the dielectric constant is lower than is observed when only a He plasma treatment is performed.

The modified low k dielectric layer may be patterned as in a via, contact hole, or trench fabrication without poisoning an adjacent photoresist layer. The modified low k dielectric layer is also more stable towards subsequent thermal treatments and a CMP process.

In a second embodiment, the low k dielectric layer may be formed on a metallization pattern. The metal pattern may be a composite of an anti-reflective layer such as TiN on a metal layer which is aluminum, for example. A conformal oxide liner comprised of a silicon rich oxide (SRO) layer or an undoped silicon glass (USG) layer or both is formed over the metal pattern. A low k dielectric layer such as carbon doped silicon oxide is deposited to fill the gaps between metal lines and forms an uneven layer above the pattern. A two step plasma treatment process is followed as described in the first embodiment. The He plasma treatment lowers the k value of the low k dielectric layer and strengthens its mechanical properties while a subsequent H₂ plasma treatment enriches the surface of the low k dielectric layer with Si-H bonds to improve the thermal stability of the layer. The method may be further comprised of depositing a planarizing low k dielectric layer on the treated low k dielectric layer. The planarizing low k dielectric layer is polished by a CMP step if further planarization is required. The method of this invention provides an advantage in that the dielectric constant of the treated low k dielectric layer with improved mechanical and thermal stability is reduced to a lower k value than is realized in an untreated low k dielectric layer.

The present invention is also an interconnect structure comprised of at least a first and second metal layer and a low k dielectric layer that serves as an insulating layer between metal lines in the second metal layer. The low k dielectric layer may extend

above the second metal layer when functioning as an interlevel dielectric (ILD) material or may be coplanar with the second metal layer in an intrametal dielectric (IMD) layer capacity.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIGS. 1 – 2 are cross-sectional views depicting a prior art method of employing a low k dielectric layer in a damascene structure.

FIGS. 3 – 6 are cross-sectional views illustrating a plasma treatment method of the present invention in a first embodiment involving a damascene scheme.

FIGS. 7 – 10 are cross-sectional views showing a plasma treatment method of the present invention in a second embodiment relating to a metallization layer.

FIG. 11 is a Fourier transform infrared (FTIR) spectrum of a low k dielectric film after curing and before and a plasma treatment of the present invention.

FIG. 12 is a FTIR spectrum of the low k dielectric film in FIG. 11 after a He plasma treatment of the present invention.

FIG. 13 is a FTIR spectrum of the low k dielectric film in FIG. 11 after a H₂ plasma treatment of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

The invention is a method of treating a low k dielectric layer comprised of carbon doped silicon oxide, HSQ, MSQ, or a similar organosilicon composition to improve its performance in a semiconductor device by hardening the layer as well as improving the thermal stability and lowering the dielectric constant of the low k dielectric layer. The

method is especially effective in modifying low k dielectric layers in a damascene scheme and in fabrication processes where a dielectric layer is deposited over a metal pattern. The drawings are provided by way of example and are not intended to limit the scope of the invention.

A first embodiment related to a damascene scheme is illustrated in FIGS. 3 to 6. Although a single damascene process is depicted, it should be understood that a dual damascene method is also included within the scope of this embodiment. Referring to FIG. 3, a substrate **20** is provided that is typically silicon and which generally contains active and passive devices (not shown). Substrate **20** is comprised of a first metal layer **21** that may be copper, tungsten, aluminum or Al/Cu. Substrate **20** may be further comprised of an optional diffusion barrier layer (not shown) that is formed on the sides and bottom of first metal layer **21** and which separates the first metal layer **21** from a dielectric layer (not shown) in substrate **20**. A method such as a CMP step is used to planarize first metal layer **21** so that it is coplanar with the top surface of substrate **20**.

An etch stop layer **22** comprised of a material such as silicon nitride, silicon oxynitride, or silicon carbide is deposited by a CVD or PECVD technique on substrate **20** and on the first metal layer **21**. Etch stop layer **22** protects first metal layer **21** from aqueous solutions, organic solvents, and etchants used in subsequent process steps.

A low k dielectric layer **23** with a thickness between about 1000 and 10000 Angstroms is then formed on etch stop layer **22**. In one embodiment, the low k dielectric layer **23** is comprised of a carbon doped oxide that is deposited by CVD or PECVD technique. The carbon doped oxide is preferably SiCOH which is also known as organosilicate glass (OSG) and is available as Black Diamond™ from Applied

Materials, CORALTM from Novellus, or as HOSP from Allied Signal, for example. The Si source gas and a carbon source gas may be flowed separately into the CVD process chamber or a source gas comprised of Si, C, H, and optionally O may be employed. Typically, an oxygen source gas such as N₂O, CO₂, or O₂ is also added to the gas mixture during the deposition. For example, an organosilane such as trimethylsilane may be flowed with O₂ into the deposition chamber. Optionally, an inert carrier gas such as Ar, N₂, or He may be used to transport a Si precursor into the process chamber if the Si precursor is a liquid with a high boiling point, for example.

When the low k dielectric layer **23** is a SiCOH layer, a typical composition is about 15-18 atomic % Si, about 28-30 atomic % oxygen, about 16-18 atomic % carbon, and about 36-38 atomic % hydrogen. However, depending on the deposition conditions and tool type, the composition may be different than in the aforementioned ranges.

In another embodiment, the low k dielectric layer **23** is comprised of a hydrogen silsesquioxane (HSQ) polymer or a methyl silsesquioxane (MSQ) polymer that is formed by a spin-on technique and cured by a conventional method known to those skilled in the art.

The low k dielectric layer **23** is typically cured after deposition by baking substrate **20** in a N₂ ambient at about 200°C to 450°C for 60 to 240 minutes. The curing step drives off moisture and residual solvents and monomers that may be contained within the low k dielectric layer. The dielectric constant for a cured low k dielectric layer **23** is about 2.8 to 3.2. Unfortunately, the low k dielectric layer is porous and does not have the necessary mechanical strength to withstand subsequent processes such as a chemical mechanical polish (CMP) step that is likely to cause a divot or scratch defect as shown

in FIG. 2. The low k dielectric layer **23** will also absorb moisture if exposed to air. Water uptake will increase the k value and can cause metal corrosion in the final device. Thus, the low k dielectric layer **23** must be modified in order to meet the requirements of new technologies that have ground rules with deep sub-micron dimensions.

A key feature of this invention is a two step plasma treatment method that may be performed in any plasma etch chamber but is preferably carried out under plasma enhanced CVD (PECVD) conditions. Preferably, the CVD chamber for the two step PECVD treatment and the process chamber used to deposit the low k dielectric layer **23** are located in the same mainframe (process tool). As depicted in FIG. 3, the first treatment step **24** is performed with a He plasma that is generated using a He flow rate of from 1500 to 6000 standard cubic centimeters per minute (sccm), a RF power of from 300 to 2500 Watts and preferably 600 to 1200 Watts, a chamber pressure between 1 mtorr and 20 torr and preferably 8 mtorr to 12 torr, and with a substrate heated to between 100°C and 500°C and preferably 250°C to 400°C. The He plasma treatment **24** is for a period of 10 to 360 seconds and is preferably for 45 to 90 seconds.

The inventors have unexpectedly found that the He plasma treatment is able to modify the low k dielectric layer **23** into a transformed low k dielectric layer **23a** that has a lower dielectric constant and is hardened compared to the low k dielectric layer **23** that has been deposited and cured. It is believed that smaller cage like arrangements of Si-O bonds become crosslinked during the He plasma treatment **24** to form a larger network of Si-O bonds that increases mechanical stability. There is no net loss of Si-CH₃ or Si-O bonds as indicated by no change in CH₄ or H₂O content in a residual gas analysis (RGA). RGA results (not shown) are plotted as pressure vs. time in seconds

for the analysis and show a flat baseline for water and methane. Furthermore, FTIR spectra show no change in the peak at about 1270 cm^{-1} corresponding to Si-C bond stretching when comparing a low k dielectric layer **23** after curing (FIG. 11) to a transformed low k dielectric layer **23a** after a He plasma treatment (FIG. 12). However, the k value is lowered in a He plasma treated low k dielectric layer as shown in Table 1 in Example 1. The k value decreases from 3 for a cured low k dielectric layer **23** to 2.78 for the transformed low k dielectric layer **23a**. Improved mechanical strength is demonstrated in the transformed low k dielectric layer **23a** by a polish rate of 80 Angstroms/min. after the He treatment **24** compared to 150 Angstroms/min. for the low k dielectric layer **23** before the He treatment.

Although a lower k value as a result of the He treatment **24** is beneficial, the inventors have discovered that the dielectric constant of the transformed low k dielectric layer **23a** is further reduced by a second treatment involving a H_2 plasma process after the He plasma treatment **24**. Surprisingly, the dielectric constant resulting from a He plasma treatment followed by a H_2 plasma treatment (Sample 6 in Table 1) is less than can be achieved by two He plasma treatments (Sample 4) or with two H_2 plasma treatments (Sample 3) of similar duration.

Referring to FIG. 4, H_2 plasma **25** is preferably generated in the same chamber used for He plasma treatment **24** without breaking a vacuum. Substrate **20** with transformed low k dielectric layer **23a** is subjected to H_2 plasma generated with the following conditions: a H_2 flow rate from 1500 to 6000 sccm; a RF power of from 300 to 2500 Watts and preferably 600 to 1200 Watts; a chamber pressure of 1 mtorr to 10 torr and preferably 1 mtorr to 6 torr; and a substrate temperature of 100°C to 500°C and

preferably 250°C to 400°C. The H₂ plasma treatment **25** is performed for a period of about 10 to 360 seconds and preferably for 45 to 90 seconds.

Unlike the He treatment **24**, the H₂ plasma treatment **25** does result in a net loss of Si-O and Si-CH₃ bonds due to cleavage of Si-O and Si-C bonds. A composite low k dielectric layer comprised of a low k dielectric layer **23b** that is enriched in Si-H bonds and which is believed to be from about 1000 to 3000 Angstroms thick and the transformed low k dielectric layer **23a** is formed as depicted in FIG. 5. Note that an upper portion of the transformed low k dielectric layer **23a** in FIG. 4 has been converted to the low k dielectric layer **23b** in FIG. 5. Therefore, the thickness of the composite low k dielectric layer in FIG. 5 is about the same as the thickness of the transformed low k dielectric layer **23a** in FIG. 4.

The FTIR spectrum in FIG. 13 shows that the absorbance at about 1270 cm⁻¹ corresponding to Si-C bond stretching in the low k dielectric layer **23b** has a lower intensity than the 1270 cm⁻¹ absorbance for the cured low k dielectric layer **23** in FIG. 11. It is also believed that some dangling Si bonds or Si atoms with a radical (unpaired electron) are converted to Si-H bonds in the low k dielectric layer **23b**. A RGA (not shown) of the H₂ plasma treated low k dielectric layer **23b** indicates the presence of H₂O and CH₄ because of Si-C and Si-O bond cleavage. The formation of Si-H bonds causes a further decrease in the dielectric constant as shown by Sample 6 in Table 1. The k value is lowered because of a higher H content and lower oxygen content in the composite low k dielectric layer compared to the transformed low k dielectric layer **23a**.

Referring to FIG. 6, the damascene process may proceed with formation of an opening **26** by conventional means which typically involves coating and patterning a

photoresist layer (not shown) on the low k dielectric layer **23b** and plasma etch transferring the opening through the low k dielectric layer **23b**, the transformed low k dielectric layer **23a**, and through etch stop layer **22**. The remaining photoresist layer is then stripped by an oxygen ashing or with an application of a liquid stripper. Although the opening may be a via or a trench formed above a via, hereafter the opening will be referred to as via **26** in order to describe the single damascene structure shown in FIG. 6. A diffusion barrier layer **27** comprised of one or more of Ta, TaN, Ti, TiN, TaSiN, W, and WN is formed on the sidewalls of the via **26** by a process known to those skilled in the art. Typically, a PECVD process or an atomic layer deposition (ALD) is used to deposit the barrier layer **27**. Optionally, the diffusion barrier layer **27** is formed on the sidewalls and bottom of the via **26**. A second metal layer **28** that is preferably copper but may be tungsten, Al, or Al/Cu is deposited by a conventional method to fill the via **26**. The single damascene structure is normally completed by a CMP step that polishes the second metal layer **28** and the diffusion barrier layer **27** to a lower level that is coplanar with the top surface of the low k dielectric layer **23b**. Note that some of the low k dielectric layer **23b** may be removed during the CMP step.

An advantage of the present invention is that the plasma treatment steps **24**, **25** transform a cured low k dielectric layer into a composite low k dielectric layer comprised of an upper low k dielectric layer that is enriched in Si-H bonds on a transformed low k dielectric layer which has a Si-O network that is mechanically strengthened so that the CMP step does not form divot or scratch defects **17**, **18** as shown in prior art FIG. 2. Moreover, the dielectric constant is decreased in the low k dielectric layer **23b** and in the transformed low k dielectric layer **23a** compared to the cured dielectric layer **23**

which provides a better insulation of the second metal layer **28**. The dual plasma treatment enables a more thermally stable low k dielectric layer **23b** that leads to a higher resistance to breakdown in subsequent thermal cycles. There is also a lower likelihood of poisoning of a photoresist layer that is coated on low k dielectric layer **23b** because of the improved hardness and thermal stability of the composite low k dielectric layer resulting from plasma treatments **24**, **25**. An increased resistance to water uptake is observed since the k value for a low k dielectric layer **23b** and a transformed low k dielectric layer **23a** that have been exposed to moisture increases by only 0.1 compared to an increase of 0.5 or more for an untreated low k dielectric layer **23**.

The present invention is also the damascene structure shown in FIG. 6 that includes a first metal layer **21** formed in a planar substrate **20**, an etch stop layer **22** formed on the substrate **20**, a composite low k dielectric layer comprised of an organosilicon material which includes an upper low k dielectric layer **23b** that is enriched in Si-H bonds on a low k dielectric layer **23a** that has a dense network of Si-O bonds formed on etch stop layer **22**, a via hole **26** formed in the low k dielectric layers **23a**, **23b** which extends through etch stop layer **22** and is aligned above first metal layer **21**, a diffusion barrier layer **27** formed on the sidewalls of the via **26** and which is coplanar with low k dielectric layer **23b**, and a second metal layer **28** that fills the via **26** and is coplanar with the low k dielectric layer **23b**. The CMP polish rate and the dielectric constant of the composite low k dielectric layer are lower than can be obtained by depositing and curing an organosilicon layer of a similar composition. Alternatively, the diffusion barrier layer **27** not only coats the sidewalls of via **26** but is also formed on the bottom of via **26** to provide a continuous layer within the via.

In a second embodiment, illustrated in FIGS. 7 – 10, a low k dielectric layer that covers a metal layer in a gap fill process is modified for improved performance. The embodiment is not limited by the drawings and may apply to any metal pattern with an organosilicon based low k dielectric layer formed thereon.

Referring to FIG. 7, a substrate **40** is provided that is typically silicon and which generally contains active and passive devices (not shown). Substrate **40** is comprised of a first metal layer that has metal lines **41a**, **41b** that may be copper, tungsten, aluminum or Al/Cu. Substrate **40** may be further comprised of an optional diffusion barrier layer (not shown) that is formed on the sides and bottom of metal lines **41a**, **41b**. A method such as a CMP step is used to planarize the metal lines **41a**, **41b** to be coplanar with substrate **40**.

A second metal layer with metal lines **42a**, **42b** comprised of copper, tungsten, Al, or Al/Cu is formed by a conventional method above the metal lines **41a**, **41b**, respectively. Optionally, an anti-reflective coating (ARC) **43** is employed in the patterning of metal lines **42a**, **42b** as is appreciated by those skilled in the art. For example, a TiN layer may be selected as an ARC **43**. An ARC is often needed to control reflectivity during the patterning of a photoresist layer (not shown) above ARC **43**. The photoresist is used as an etch mask while the pattern is plasma etched through ARC **43** and through the second metal layer to form metal lines **42a**, **42b**. A conformal oxide layer **44** is then deposited by a CVD or PECVD technique on substrate **40** and on metal lines **42a**, **42b**. The oxide layer **44** may be comprised of a silicon rich oxide (SRO) or an undoped silicate glass (USG) layer. Alternatively, a USG layer may be deposited on an SRO layer to afford a composite oxide layer **44** on substrate **40** and on metal lines **42a**, **42b**.

A low k dielectric layer **45** is deposited by a CVD, PECVD, or by a spin-on method on oxide layer **44** to a thickness that covers metal lines **42a**, **42b** and the ARC **43**. Preferably, the low k dielectric layer **45** has a thickness t_1 from about 2000 to 8000 Angstroms above the top of the ARC **43** and has good gap fill capability so that no voids are formed between the metal lines **42a**, **42b**. Note that the surface of the low k dielectric layer **45** is uneven and is higher above metal lines **42a**, **42b** than above portions of substrate **40** having no overlying metal lines. An improved method of depositing a low k dielectric layer over a metal line pattern is provided in TSMC patent application TS02-0520 which is herein incorporated by reference. For example, a high density plasma technique for depositing a low k dielectric layer **45** is useful in providing good gap fill capability.

In one embodiment, the low k dielectric layer **45** is comprised of a carbon doped oxide that is deposited by a CVD or PECVD technique in a process chamber. The carbon doped oxide is preferably SiCOH which is also known as organosilicate glass (OSG) and is available as Black DiamondTM from Applied Materials, CORALTM from Novellus, or HOSP from Allied Signal. The Si source gas and a carbon source gas may be flowed separately into the CVD process chamber or a source gas comprised of Si, C, H, and optionally O may be employed. Typically, an oxygen precursor gas such as N₂O or O₂ is also added to the gas mixture during the deposition. For example, an organosilane such as trimethylsilane may be flowed with O₂ into the process chamber. Optionally, an inert carrier gas such as Ar, N₂, or He may be used to transport the Si precursor into the process chamber if the precursor is a liquid with a high boiling point, for example.

When the low k dielectric layer **45** is a SiCOH layer, the composition is typically about 15-18 atomic % Si, about 28-30 atomic % oxygen, about 16-18 atomic % carbon, and about 36-38 atomic % hydrogen. However, depending on the deposition conditions and tool type, the composition may be different than in the aforementioned ranges.

In another embodiment, the low k dielectric layer **45** is comprised of a hydrogen silsesquioxane (HSQ) polymer or a methyl silsesquioxane (MSQ) polymer that is formed by a spin-on technique and cured by a conventional method known to those skilled in the art.

The low k dielectric layer **45** is typically cured after deposition by baking substrate **40** in a N₂ ambient at about 200°C to 450°C for 60 to 240 minutes. The curing step drives off moisture and residual solvents and monomers that may be contained within the film. The dielectric constant for a cured low k dielectric layer **45** is approximately 2.8 to 3.2. Unfortunately, the layer is porous and does not have the necessary mechanical strength to withstand subsequent processes such as a chemical mechanical polish (CMP) step that is likely to cause a divot or scratch defect as shown in FIG. 2. The low k dielectric layer **45** will also absorb moisture if exposed to air. Water uptake will increase the k value and can cause metal corrosion in the final device. Therefore, the low k dielectric layer **45** must be modified in order to meet the requirements of new technologies that have ground rules with deep sub-micron dimensions.

A key feature of this invention is a two step plasma treatment that may be performed in any plasma etch chamber but is preferably carried out under PECVD conditions. Preferably, the CVD process chamber for the two step PECVD treatment and the process chamber used to deposit the low k dielectric layer **23** are located in the same

mainframe. As depicted in FIG. 7, the first treatment step **46** is performed with He plasma that is generated with a He flow rate of 1500 to 6000 sccm, a RF power of from 300 to 2500 Watts and preferably from 600 to 1200 Watts, a chamber pressure between 1 mtorr and 20 torr and preferably between 8 mtorr and 12 torr, and with a substrate heated between 100°C and 500°C and preferably 250°C to 400°C. The He plasma treatment **46** is for a period of 10 to 360 seconds and preferably for 45 to 90 seconds.

The inventors have unexpectedly found that the He plasma treatment is able to modify the low k dielectric layer **45** into a transformed low k dielectric layer **45a** that has a lower dielectric constant and is hardened compared to the low k dielectric layer **45**. It is believed that smaller cage like arrangements of Si-O bonds become more highly crosslinked to form a larger network of Si-O bonds that increases mechanical stability. There is no net loss of Si-CH₃ or Si-O bonds as a result of the He plasma treatment **46** as indicated by no change in CH₄ or H₂O content in a residual gas analysis (RGA). RGA results (not shown) are plotted as pressure vs. time in seconds and show a flat baseline for water and methane. Furthermore, FTIR spectra show no change in the peak at about 1270 cm⁻¹ corresponding to Si-C bond stretching when comparing a low k dielectric layer **45** after curing (FIG. 11) to a transformed low k dielectric layer **45a** after a He plasma treatment **46** (FIG. 12). However, the k value is lowered in a He plasma treated low k dielectric layer as shown in Table 1 in Example 1. The k value decreases from 3 for a cured low k dielectric layer **45** to 2.78 for the transformed low k dielectric layer **45a**.

Although a lower k value as a result of the He plasma treatment **46** is beneficial, the inventors have discovered that the dielectric constant of the transformed low k dielectric

layer **45a** is further reduced by a second treatment involving H₂ plasma. Surprisingly, the dielectric constant resulting from a He plasma treatment followed by a H₂ plasma treatment (Sample 6 in Table 1) is less than can be achieved by two He plasma treatments (Sample 4) or with two H₂ plasma treatments (Sample 3) of similar duration.

Referring to FIG. 8, H₂ plasma **47** is preferably generated in the same process chamber used for the He plasma treatment **46** without breaking a vacuum. Substrate **40** with the transformed low k dielectric layer **45a** is subjected to a H₂ plasma generated with the following conditions: a H₂ flow rate from 1500 to 6000 sccm; a RF power of from 300 to 2500 Watts and preferably 600 to 1200 Watts; a chamber pressure of 1 mTorr to 10 Torr; and a substrate temperature of 100°C to 500°C and preferably 250°C to 400°C. The H₂ plasma treatment **47** is performed for a period of about 10 to 360 seconds and preferably for 45 to 90 seconds.

Unlike the He plasma treatment **46**, the H₂ plasma treatment **47** does result in a net loss of Si-O and Si-CH₃ bonds due to cleavage of Si-O and Si-C bonds. A composite low k dielectric layer comprised of a low k dielectric layer **45b** that is enriched in Si-H bonds and which is believed to be from about 1000 to 3000 Angstroms thick and the transformed low k dielectric layer **45a** is formed as depicted in FIG. 9. Note that an upper portion of the transformed low k dielectric layer **45a** in FIG. 8 has been converted to the low k dielectric layer **45b** in FIG. 9. Therefore, the thickness of the composite low k dielectric layer in FIG. 9 is about the same as the thickness of the transformed low k dielectric layer **45a** in FIG. 8.

The FTIR spectrum in FIG. 13 shows that the absorbance at about 1270 cm⁻¹ corresponding to Si-C bond stretching in the low k dielectric layer **45b** has a lower

intensity than the 1270 cm^{-1} absorbance for the cured low k dielectric layer **45** in FIG.

11. It is also believed that some dangling Si bonds or Si atoms with a radical (unpaired electron) are converted to Si-H bonds in the low k dielectric layer **45b**. A RGA (not shown) of the H_2 plasma treated low k dielectric layer **45b** indicates the presence of H_2O and CH_4 because of Si-C and Si-O bond cleavage. The formation of Si-H bonds causes a further decrease in the dielectric constant as shown by Sample 6 in Table 1. The k value is lowered because of a higher H content and lower oxygen content in the composite low k dielectric layer compared to the transformed low k dielectric layer **45a**.

Referring to FIG. 10, the surface of the composite low k dielectric layer comprised of the low k dielectric layer **45b** and the transformed low k dielectric layer **45a** must be planarized in order for subsequent processes such as photoresist patterning (not shown) to have an optimum process latitude. Typically, a CMP step is employed to planarize the low k dielectric layer **45b**. Note that some of low k dielectric layer **45a** may also be removed in the planarization step.

An advantage of the present invention is that the plasma treatment steps **46**, **47** transform the cured dielectric layer **45** into a composite low k dielectric layer comprised of an upper low k dielectric layer that is enriched in Si-H bonds on a low k dielectric layer which has a Si-O network that is mechanically strengthened so that the CMP step does not form divot or scratch defects in the low k dielectric layer **45b** or in the transformed low k dielectric layer **45a**. Moreover, the dielectric constant is decreased in the composite low k dielectric layer compared to the cured low k dielectric layer **45** to provide a better insulation of the metal lines **42a**, **42b** on substrate **40**.

Another advantage of the composite low k dielectric layer is that the low k dielectric layer **45b** and the transformed low k dielectric layer **45a** are stabilized. For example, an increased resistance to water uptake is observed since the k value for the composite low k dielectric layer that has been exposed to moisture increases by only 0.1 compared to an increase of 0.5 or more for an untreated low k dielectric layer **45**. In addition, the dual plasma treatment enables a more thermally stable low k dielectric layer **45b** that leads to a higher resistance to breakdown in subsequent thermal cycles. There is also a lower likelihood of poisoning of a photoresist layer that comes in contact with the composite low k dielectric layer because of the improved hardness and thermal stability of the composite low k dielectric layer as a result of the plasma treatments **46**, **47**. The invention can be readily implemented in manufacturing since the He/H₂ treated low k dielectric layer is compatible with state of the art deposition and etching techniques.

The present invention is also an interconnect structure shown in FIG. 10 that includes a first metal layer comprised of metal lines **41a**, **41b** formed in a substrate **40**, a second metal layer having metal lines **42a**, **42b** with sidewalls and a top surface formed on metal lines **41a**, **41b**, respectively, an ARC layer **43** on the top surface of the metal lines **42a**, **42b**, a conformal oxide layer **44** formed on substrate **40**, on the sidewalls of metal lines **42a**, **42b**, and on ARC **43**, and a composite organosilicon low k dielectric layer comprised of a lower low k dielectric layer **45a** with a dense network of Si-O bonds formed on the conformal oxide layer **44** and an upper low k dielectric layer **45b** that is enriched in Si-H bonds. The CMP polish rate and the dielectric constant of the composite low k dielectric layer are lower than can be obtained by depositing and curing an organosilicon layer of a similar composition. Note that the level of the low k

dielectric layer **45a** fills the gap between metal lines **42a**, **42b** and extends to a height that is above the top surface of the conformal oxide layer **44** on metal lines **42a**, **42b**. The top surface of the low k dielectric layer **42a** is uneven and reaches a highest level above substrate **40** at points above metal lines **42a**, **42b**. The top surface of the low k dielectric layer **42b** is planar and may not cover the low k dielectric layer **42a** at some points above the metal lines **42a**, **42b**.

EXAMPLE 1

This example illustrates the advantage of the present invention with regard to a further lowering of the dielectric constant in a low k dielectric layer by a post-deposition plasma treatment. A 5000 Angstrom thick SiCOH layer was deposited on several silicon wafers in a CVD process chamber using a PECVD process comprising 2,4,6,8-tetramethylcyclotetrasiloxane (TMCTS), CH₄, and O₂ precursors at flow rates of 6400, 1600, and 1600 sccm, respectively at 250°C with a chamber pressure of 5 torr, and a RF power of 1000 Watts. The wafers were cured by baking at 400°C in an oven for 60 minutes. A k value of 3.0 was observed by a measurement performed with a Hg probe as shown in Table 1. Sample 1 was obtained by subjecting a first wafer with a SiCOH layer to H₂ plasma with a RF power of 900 Watts, a H₂ flow rate of 1800 sccm, a chamber pressure of 5 torr, and a substrate temperature of 400°C for 60 seconds. Sample 2 was generated in a similar fashion except that a He flow rate of 6000 sccm was used in place of a H₂ flow rate of 1800 sccm on a second wafer. Sample 3 was produced by treating a SiCOH layer on a third wafer as in Sample 1 except the H₂ treatment was performed twice for a total of 120 seconds. Likewise, the He process to

give Sample 2 was performed twice on a SiCOH layer on a fourth wafer to yield Sample 4. Sample 5 was obtained by treating a SiCOH layer on a fifth wafer with the H₂ plasma treatment described above for 60 seconds followed by the He plasma treatment for 60 seconds. Sample 6 was obtained by treating a SiCOH layer on a sixth wafer with the He process for 60 seconds followed by the H₂ process for 60 seconds.

As shown in Table 1, a He plasma treatment reduces the k value of a cured SiCOH layer from 3.0 to 2.78 and a second He plasma treatment further reduces the dielectric constant to 2.739. Similarly, a H₂ plasma treatment reduces the k value of a cured SiCOH layer and a second H₂ plasma treatment further lowers the k value. Surprisingly, a H₂ treatment followed by a He treatment provides a lower k value than two H₂ treatments and a He treatment followed by a H₂ treatment yields a lower k value than two He treatments. The process that includes a He treatment followed by a H₂ treatment yields a SiCOH layer with a lower dielectric constant than other treatments. Note that all these results are for 60 second treatment periods and that k values may be adjusted higher or lower based on shorter or longer plasma treatment times, respectively.

Table 1			
Dielectric Constant of a SiCOH layer after different plasma treatments			
	1 st treatment	2 nd treatment	K value
SiCOH after cure	--	--	3.0
Sample 1	H ₂	none	2.76
Sample 2	He	none	2.78
Sample 3	H ₂	H ₂	2.731
Sample 4	He	He	2.739
Sample 5	H ₂	He	2.727
Sample 6	He	H ₂	2.720

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While this invention has been particularly shown and described with reference to, the preferred embodiments thereof, it will be understood by those skilled in the art that various changes in form and details may be made without departing from the spirit and scope of this invention.